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ABSTRACT

A Memphis State University Program to familiarize prospective students and other college-bound students with academic and service information regarding college attendance is described. The program is designed to ease the transition from high school to college, to identify resources available at the university, to improve the university's public relations with high school students and counselors, to improve the retention rate of new students, and to increase the number of students from the university's primary feeder high schools. The program was developed based on the input of prospective students and counselors. A workshop was held and students and counselors were given a schedule of classes, academic information, a university bulletin, and student aid fact sheet. Information was provided on college terms such as department, elective, and semester hours, and on areas such as academic regulations, procedures for dropping courses, and department requirements. Tips for scheduling concerned information on locations of building and time between classes. Resources available through academic counseling, career counseling, educational support programs, and other services were also discussed. At the conclusion of each session evaluations were distributed, which involved student ranking of categories most helpful and least helpful. In 1980 students ranked scheduling as the most helpful area of the workshop and identified computation of grade point average as least helpful. About one week after the presentation, a subjective evaluation was sent to counselors and teachers involved. Additional findings and overall outcomes of the workshop are discussed. (SW)

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"A NON-TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO PRE-COLLEGE COUNSELING"

Memphis State University

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INTRODUCTION

Students moving from high school to college are confronted with a myriad of new terms and procedures, as well as a new environment. As a result, students experience a great deal of confusion and frustration. One of the roles of a college adviser is to ease this transition. Paramount questions are: How can we do this sooner? How can students become better informed? How can a more familiar and comfortable environment be provided? When are students more impressionable?

Most college orientation programs are an answer to these questions but do they occur soon enough? Our workshop, COLLEGE/GETTING DOWN TO BASICS, has been presented for two years and has proven to be effective in answering some of these questions and solving some of these problems.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of College/Getting Down To Basics was to familiarize prospective Memphis State University students and other college bound students with academic and service information regarding college attendance. Other purposes and objectives were:

1. To acquaint students with college language.
2. To ease the transition from high school to college.
3. To identify the various available resources of the University.
4. To improve Memphis State University's public relation with high school students and counselors.
5. To improve the retention rate of new students.
6. To increase the number of students from Memphis State University's primary feeder high schools.

In establishing and developing the College/Getting Down To Basics pilot program the underlying concern and thrust was to address factors 5 and 6 above.

To accomplish the purpose and objectives of College/Getting Down To Basics, a workshop was developed and implemented. The intent of the workshop was to involve students and counselors in the process, promote discussion and impart information that could be used by the prospective Memphis State University/college bound student and counselor.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

Memphis State University attracts its enrollment from many outside states as well as counties within the state but the primary feeder high schools (public and private) are found locally. These are the schools that were the focal point for College/Getting Down To Basics.

In early Spring of 1980 and 1981 each high school counselor was contacted and given an explanation of the content of the workshop. At that time a request was also made for approximately forty-five minutes to one hour to talk with the college bound seniors. Those counselors who could not confirm a date or who needed additional information were sent an outline of the workshop (which included the purpose and the objectives) along with a letter again requesting the opportunity to present the workshop College/Getting Down To Basics.

Each high school counselor was made aware that the workshop was definitely not designed as a recruitment tool for Memphis State University but rather to aid all college bound students (Memphis State or otherwise). Because of the workshop's affiliation with Memphis State University a few counselors only allowed students interested in Memphis State to attend.

Each student and counselor was given:

1. Academic Information Handout
2. Schedule of Classes
3. Memphis State Bulletin
4. Student Aid Fact Sheet

The academic information handout contained college terms such as department, elective, prerequisite, semester hours and major. This handout along with the MSU Bulletin was given to students to further

clarify terms frequently used in the bulletin. (The Bulletins were later collected.) Students were asked to follow along in their copy as the presenters reviewed the information most pertinent to the students as a college freshman. Students were familiarized with the purpose and arrangement of the bulletin as well as the types of information found in it. Areas reviewed included university, college, and department requirements, academic regulations, credit by exam, dropping, adding and withdrawing procedures, as well as descriptions of courses.

An opportunity was also provided for the students to arrange a class schedule using the provided Schedule of Classes, the sample adviser's slip and a list of courses. The sample adviser's slip also listed a typical beginning freshman's schedule which included courses, times, days, building, as well as room numbers. Tips for scheduling were also provided: being aware of locations of buildings, time between classes, balancing the schedule and the organization of the Schedule of Classes. A graph from ACT was made available to aid the student in determing first semester case load. The determining factor on the graph was the student's ACT composite score.

Available resources at Memphis State University were discussed, particularly those located in the Center for Student Development (Educational Support Program, Academic Counseling, Career Counseling, Personal Counseling and Testing). The students were reminded that not all colleges and universities have all these various components but will have similar services under different names.

Those students who were Memphis State bound were encouraged to visit the campus and meet with an adviser as soon as possible in order to reinforce information that had been given in the workshop. Students

who planned to attend college elsewhere were encouraged to visit their college and get information early.

At the conclusion of each session evaluations were distributed. In 1980 approximately 700 of the 950 students who attended the workshop completed evaluations. In 1981, of the 1300 attending, 900 completed evaluations.

The evaluation asked the students to rank, in order, the categories they felt were most helpful and least helpful to them. The table and graph at the end of this report reflect the students' rankings of the categories. The numbers and percentages do not reflect the number of students who ranked the categories as number one but rather those students who ranked the categories as one of their first four choices. Likewise, the least helpful were ranked as choices between five and nine. The same information is also pictorially displayed in the graph.

In 1980 students ranked scheduling as the most helpful area of the workshop. As a result, in 1981 more time was devoted to scheduling. Results from the 1981 evaluations again revealed that scheduling was the most helpful. At least 50% of all students felt that catalog review, New Student Orientation, study/course load and using the Schedule of Classes were most helpful.

In Spring 1980 students identified two areas as the least helpful: (1) the need for computing grade point average and (2) the need for information regarding the Center for Student Development. Based on these findings, the category, computing grade point average, was deleted from the Spring 1981 workshop. Information concerning the Center for Student Development was not deleted because students, at this time, are possibly unable to recognize the need for such services as those provided by the

Center for Student Development.

The graphs reflect that "J" (other) was ranked as least helpful in both 1980 and 1981. Because few specifics were identified, this category is not a true representation of a "least helpful" category.

Students were asked if information was presented clearly. Ninety six percent responded positively as compared to 91% during Spring 1980. Those who did not feel the information was presented clearly comprised 1% as compared to 4% in the previous year. There was no consensus among those students as to the areas not clear. The remaining 3% did not respond to the question compared to 5% the preceding year.

As stated previously, the presenters included in the workshop information that was most needed by beginning freshmen. In an effort to include all the important areas, the students were asked to indicate information they needed but were not given. Although a fact sheet on student aid and scholarships was included in the handout material, students again requested information on student aid and scholarships. Other areas listed most frequently included: cost of attending MSU, housing, admission requirements and department information.

Students were not chosen to attend the workshop based on their interest in MSU, yet 58% (1980-60%) indicated that MSU was one of the colleges they were considering. Thirty one percent (1980-24%) indicated they were not considering MSU and 11% (1980-16%) gave no answer. The thrust of the workshop was to involve <u>any</u> college-bound student rather than limiting it to MSU-bound students. At four of the schools the workshop was presented to <u>all</u> senior English classes. This type of expansion resulted in a broader audience and was possibly the reason for the decrease in the percentages of those considering MSU.

Approximately one week after the presentation in 1980 and 1981, a subjective evaluation was sent to the counselors and teachers involved, asking their comments on College/Getting Down To Basics. They were asked to include their feelings about the presentation, both positive and negative, as well as the comments they had received from students. As a result of comments and suggestions from the previous year's evaluation, revisions were implemented in the workshop during Spring 1981. Such revisions included: the addition of audio-visuals, a less business-like approach, an additional handout (student aid) and a more concise and attractive handout of general college information. It appeared that the implementation of the revisions improved the quality of the 1981 presentation. No negative comments or new suggestions were mentioned in the 1981 evaluations. The following quote from a counselor summarizes the evaluation comments received from the other high school counselors and teachers:

> "This program is excellent. The presenters do an excellent job in the explanation of what students are to expect upon entering college. Information about schedules, semester hours, college advisors, etc. will be most helpful to students. The informal, conversational manner in which they speak to students evokes a very receptive, attentive response from students. This causes students to freely ask questions and make comments. We are proud that (our high school) was chosen to participate in this program and highly recommend an orientation program of this kind for all high schools in the Memphis area."

OUTCOMES

As explained earlier, the primary objective of the workshop, College/Getting Down To Basics, was to familiarize prospective MSU and other college-bound seniors with academic and service information. It should be noted, however, that there were several secondary outcomes:

1. More direct contact with high school counselors.
2. Establishment of a better working relationship with counselors.
3. Earlier opportunity for high school students to meet a college academic counselor.

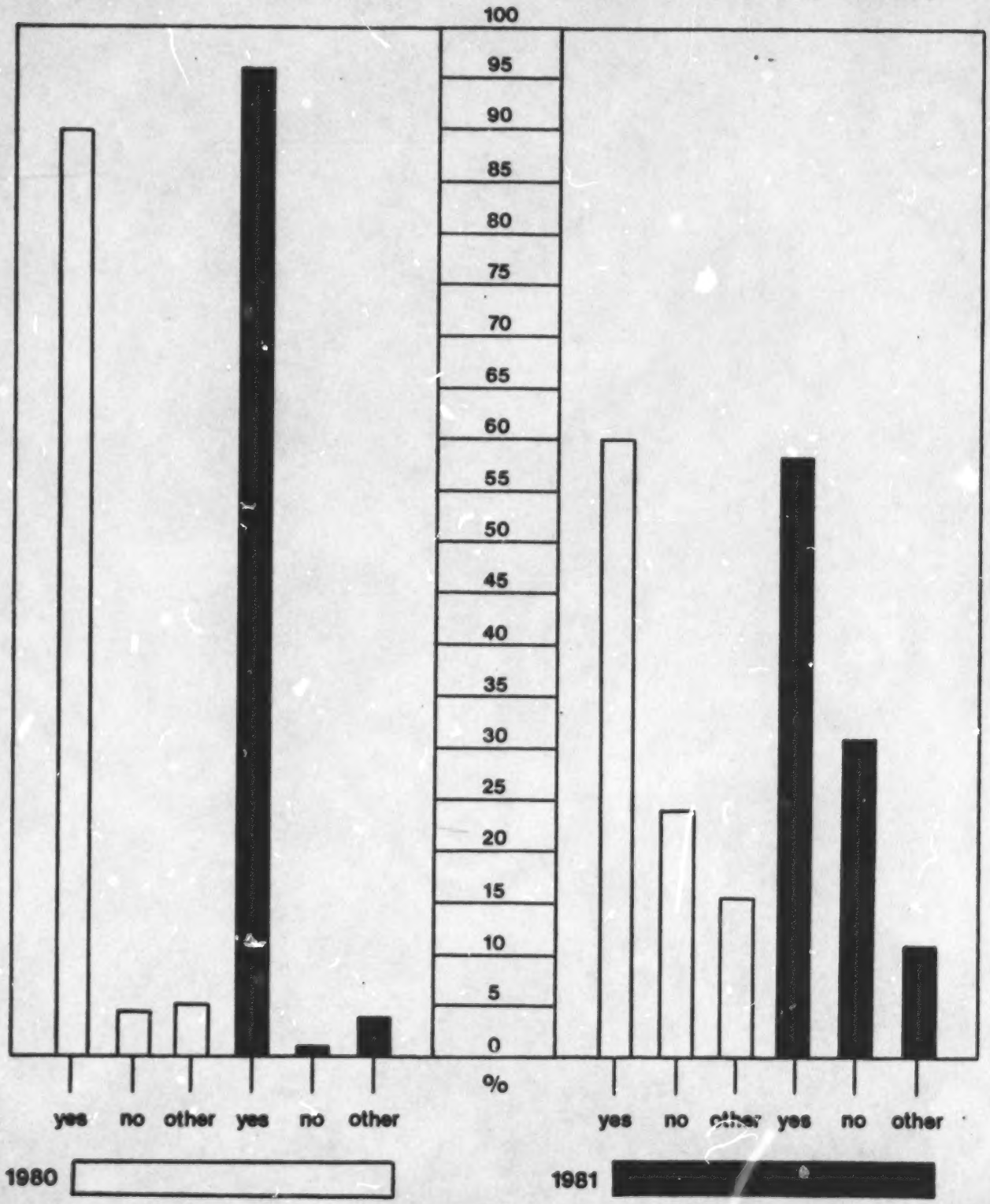
As a result the presenters not only found it easier to schedule the workshops but also easier to schedule more workshops in each high school. Because of this increased contact, high school counselors now feel more at ease calling to get information and to make campus referrals.

During each session of the workshop, students were encouraged to visit an academic counselor prior to New Student Orientation. Each year evaluations are sent to students who have attended. Results from the 1980 evaluations revealed that 60% had seen an advisor prior to New Student Orientation as compared with 36% in 1979. No additional efforts were made by the Academic Counseling Unit to encourage students to come in early for advising, so it is quite possible that the workshop provided that additional encouragement.

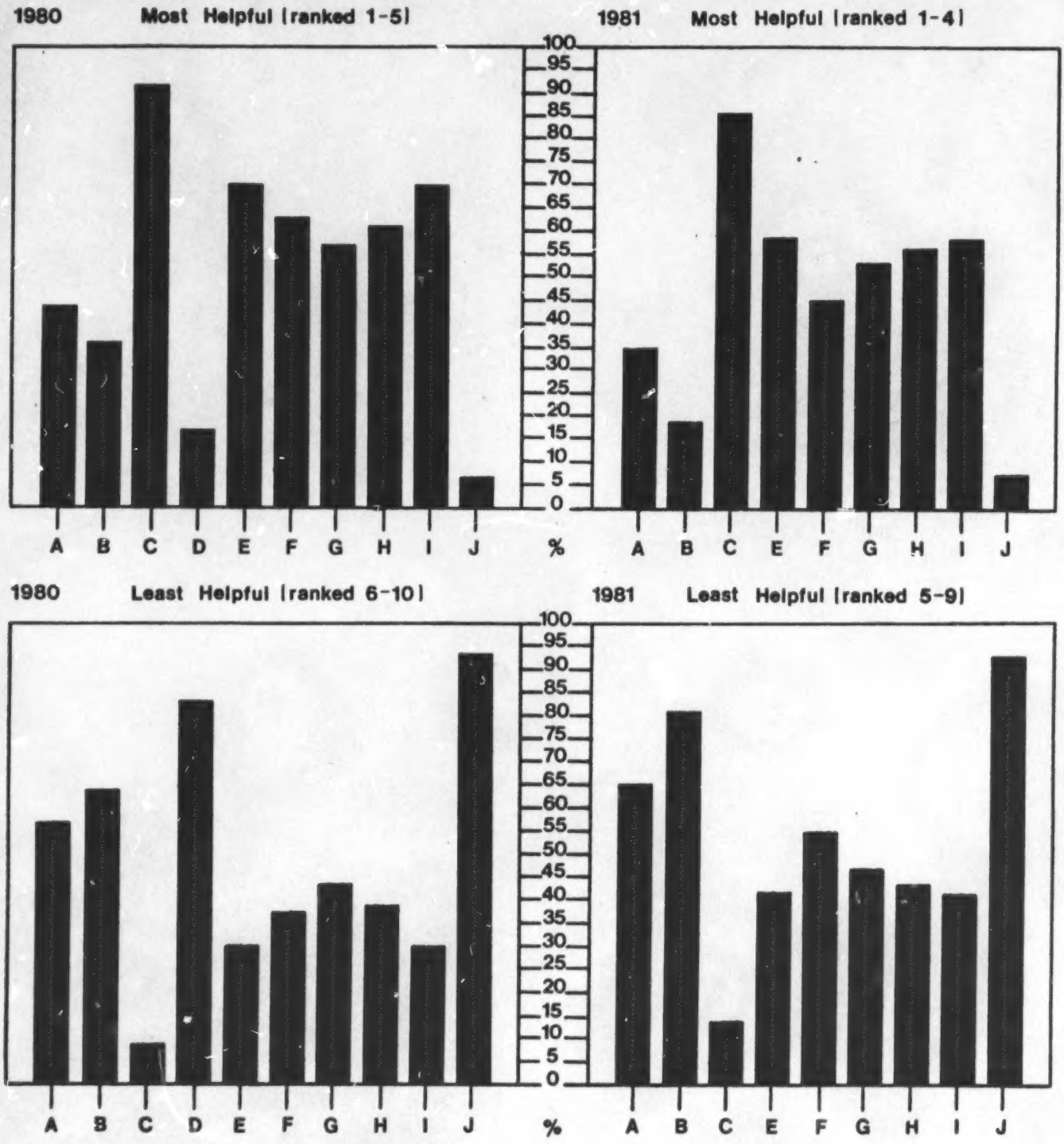
EVALUATION

Was the material presented clearly?

Is M.S.U. one of the colleges that you are considering attending?



Student Ranking of Categories Discussed in Workshop



A - College Terms
B - Center for Student Development
C - Scheduling
D - Computing G.P.A.*
E - Catalog Review
F - Steps for Admission
G - New Student Orientation
H - Study/Case Load
I - Using Schedule of Classes
J - Other - please specify

*not included in 1981 analysis